

**Luke 3:1-6 – Something Big Is Going to Happen.**  
**Advent 2 – December 7, 2014**  
**Resurrection Lutheran Church, Verona, Wisconsin**

Say your husband comes home from deer hunting and says, “Honey, there I was. Out in the woods. It had to have been at least twenty below. Every other hunter in the county had called it a day. I was just about ready to give up when all of the sudden way off in the distance, I saw it.” How does that story end? I’m guessing you’d expect to find a trophy buck in the back of the pickup and not just a muddy pair of boots, right?

Say your wife comes home from a day of shopping on Black Friday and says, “Honey, there I was. Standing in line. It had to have been at least twenty below. When the doors finally opened, I sprinted as fast as I could. I had to hurdle one shopper who had fallen down and dodge the flying elbow of the another who wanted the same item I did. But in spite of the crowds and the craziness, I got there first.” How does that story end? I’m guessing you’d expect that she brought home the new flat screen that was marked way down and not just a loaf of bread and a jumbo pack of toilet paper, right?

You can tell a lot about a story by how it begins, can’t you? Stories that are about big things, about epic, life-altering events generally require a lot of build up. And stories that aren’t don’t.

So what did you think about the way that Luke’s story begins? At first, the opening verses might seem like one of those sections of Scripture that we can kind of skip right over. A lot of names and places that are tough to pronounce and aren’t familiar to us. But when think about it, we realize, this is the way you start a story about something really big. He starts by mentioning Tiberius Caesar, the Roman emperor, the man who ruled the entire civilized world. Then he mentions some local rulers, including Pontius Pilate, the man who governed the southern part of Israel, which included the capital city of Jerusalem. He mentions Annas and Caiaphas, the high priests, the heads of the Jewish religion.

So say it’s fifty years from now. And you pull your grandchild up to sit on your knee. And you say, “Sweetie, there I was. “It was 2014. Barack Obama was in the White House. Scott Walker had just been elected to his second term as governor. And Pope Francis ruled the Catholic Church. How does that story end? The Packers won their fifth Super Bowl? It was 75 degrees on Christmas Day? I won the lottery? I’m guessing that’s not a story about going to the dentist to get a filling. So when John starts his story this way, it makes us think **Something Big Is Going to Happen.**

But then we read on. And we hear about this guy named John. Not a ruler. Just a guy preaching about a thing called repentance. And not in a palace. Not in the temple. Out in the desert. Down by the river. He didn’t wear a crown or religious robes. He had a long, shaggy beard. He wore clothes made of camel’s hair. He ate locusts and wild honey.

I suppose there was a certain curiosity factor. People wanted to go out and see this strange looking guy and this new ritual that he was performing, this thing called baptism. But can you imagine the reaction many people had when they went out and they saw him and saw one of those baptisms. A few words and a splash of water. That's it? I took a bath this morning already, so, I'm good.

So maybe it seems as though Luke isn't being fair, you know, building us up like this. In fact, Luke had done this once before. You probably remember that story. It goes, "In those days, Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.)" The story of Jesus' birth began the same way, making us think something big was going to happen.

But do you realize that thirty years have now passed? Sure a couple of the names have changed. But the basic landscape of power remains undisturbed. The Romans still rule the world. A foreigner is still in power in Jerusalem.

And maybe we'd think, Ok, but now Jesus is going to begin his public ministry. He's going to emerge from the private life he's lived up until now and things are going to start to happen. Heads are going to start to roll. Here's a little heads up. When Jesus' public ministry was done, every single one of these men still held his office. And in fact, rather than Jesus somehow leading an overthrow of any of them, each one of them played some sort of role in Jesus' death. So when Luke begins this way, we might be think something big is going to happen. But then we read on. And we might be a tad disappointed.

So if a lot of build up usually precedes some sort of epic, life-altering event, what does that say about the day that's coming up eighteen days from now. Is there any more buildup for any other day of the year than Christmas? The decorating, the shopping, and the baking. The deadlines, the year-end reports, the budget forecasts, and the office parties.

And I think all of that build up causes us to think that when December 25 finally arrives, something big is going to happen. As if this one special day of the year has some sort of magical power. Maybe it's the intoxicating brew of all the words we hear around Christmas, words like hope and peace and good will and giving. Maybe it's just the eggnog. But whatever it is, we get this expectation that, no matter what happened from January through November, somehow that magical sixth-last day of the year is going to make it all better. The things we normally find annoying will suddenly become endearing. Broken relationships will suddenly heal. Failures will suddenly look smaller and accomplishments suddenly greater. We put a lot of weight on Christmas, don't we?

And if all of that buildup for Christmas has caused you to think that something big is going to happen, you've no doubt experienced that sinking feeling when Christmas comes and goes and nothing really does. Sure the closets are a little fuller. Sure the kids have all new toys that will keep them entertained at least until February. But did the problems at work really go away? Did the strife in your family get any better? Part of you wonders: what was it all for? And

now you have to undo everything you spent all of December so busily doing - taking down the lights, putting away the decorations, finishing all the food.

So maybe we should change our expectations. I mean, what else would a guy with a long shaggy beard who wore camel's hair and ate grasshoppers be good for if not changing expectations. Sure he didn't come to announce the fall of Rome or the rise of an independent Jewish state. He didn't come to make friends or influence people. He didn't come to win fame or fortune, power or prosperity. But he came to announce the advent of the kingdom of heaven. He came to share some good news about a war that had been going on since the dawn of time. Not the kind that's fought over things like land or oil. Not the kind of war that's fought with things like nuclear warheads or drones. The war that's fought between God and the devil, between all that is good and all that is evil. The war that's fought over the turf of your heart.

John came to announce that this war was about to take a dramatic turn. He came to proclaim the arrival of the mighty champion who would crush the head of the devil for all mankind. He came to proclaim that no one deserved to be a part of this kingdom but that anyone would be welcomed in with open arms. He came to dispense the power of the almighty God – turning self-serving and self-righteous hearts into humble and hopeful hearts through the preaching of repentance and through this simple, miraculous act called baptism.

So there's an important lesson we can learn from John. The crowds were no doubt looking for someone who could shake things up, someone at the start of whose career Tiberius might be Caesar, Pilate might be governor, and Annas and Caiaphas might be the high priests, but by the end of whose career they wouldn't. Instead, they got a man who clearly and convincingly pointed to Jesus. A man who directed them to the one who wouldn't make their lives on earth better or win back their nation, but a man who would win them back from Satan and secure them a spot in heaven.

So during these next eighteen days, all of this buildup might cause us to think that when Christmas finally comes, we will suddenly feel better about our relationship status, our salary, or the square footage of our house. But if that's what we're expecting, odds are we will be disappointed.

But during these next eighteen days, in addition to all that is going on, we'll also have an opportunity to hear the good news about our Savior – even more than we usually do. We'll have a chance to teach our kids the Christmas story and maybe a Christmas hymn or two. We'll have a chance to invite someone who isn't hearing this vital news to join us. We'll have the chance to give someone Jesus, the most important gift there is.

And while we'll never remember what we ate, or what we got, who had the ugliest Christmas sweater at the office party or who had the best lights on the block, I guarantee that the work God does in our hearts and in the hearts of our loved ones during these next eighteen days will last forever. In other words, don't think something big is going to happen. Instead, prepare the way for the Lord. Because something even bigger is. Amen.